

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE & FISHERIES
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Waterfowl Population Estimates
in Louisiana's Coastal Zone Below
U.S. Highway 90 and on Catahoula Lake

Date: Coastal Zone: Sept. 8-10
Catahoula Lake: Sept. 9

Reported By: L. Reynolds and J. Olszak

September 11, 2014

Pilot: B. Dorsa

Estimates made from Aircraft

SPECIES	SOUTHWEST	SOUTHEAST	CATAHOULA LAKE	TOTALS
MALLARD	**			
MOTTLED	9,000	21,000		30,000
GADWALL				
WIGEON				
GW TEAL				
BW TEAL	90,000	9,000	2,000	101,000
SHOVELER	3,000		**	3,000
PINTAIL		1,000	**	1,000
TOTAL DABLERS	102,000	31,000	2,000	135,000
SCAUP				
RINGNECKED				
CANVASBACK				
TOTAL DIVERS				
TOTAL DUCKS	102,000	31,000	2,000	135,000
COOTS		**		

**Estimate is less than 1,000

COMMENTS:

The estimate of 101,000 blue-winged teal from this survey is over twice last year's record low estimate of 50,000, but is 56% lower than the long-term average of 232,000, and is the third lowest on record ahead of only the 50,000 last year and 99,000 in 2002. Estimates in both southwest and southeast coastal Louisiana regions more than doubled from September 2013, but the count at Catahoula Lake was 33% lower than last year. The largest concentrations of bluewings in southwest Louisiana were seen in flooded agricultural fields just north of Lacassine NWR Pool, and southeast of Welsh. No sizeable groups were seen on southeast Louisiana transects, and very few teal were counted until the

last transect line near Baptiste Collette bayou. Despite the increase from last year in southeast Louisiana, the 3 lowest estimates for blue-winged teal in this region since 1969 have come from the last 3 September surveys, and the 6 lowest estimates have come in the last 7 years.

For the second consecutive year, the mottled duck estimate increased: from the record low of 19,000 in 2012, to 25,000 last year, to 30,000 from this survey. However, mottled ducks were down nearly 50% in southwest Louisiana and were seen at low frequency on most transect lines until the final line near the mouth of the Mississippi River. The estimate remains below the most recent 5-year average of 33,000.

Habitat conditions across coastal Louisiana are very good. Shallow flooding in many agricultural fields and pastures from recent rainfall in southwest Louisiana is providing habitat in addition to managed water at this time. Water levels in the marsh are higher than in recent years, and maybe higher than optimum for foraging waterfowl in some locations. Good production of seed-producing annual vegetation and submerged aquatic vegetation was visible across the SW coastal areas. In southeast Louisiana, there is good to excellent submerged aquatic growth, comparable to last year, in most areas with good water levels. However, broad expanses of algae and other floating aquatics (possibly invasive) were noted in marshes along a number of southeast transects.

Habitat conditions at Catahoula Lake are poorer than last year due to wetter conditions during drawdown caused by untimely rainfall events and shoaling in some areas preventing efficient drainage of the lakebed. Production of moist-soil vegetation is markedly lower than last year, but water levels are being kept slightly higher so that more acreage of shallow-flooded habitat is currently available. The 2,000 bluewings counted on the lake during this survey was disappointing because well over 5,000 were noted last Saturday during a shorebird survey. That is characteristic of early-migrating blue-winged teal, and abundance of birds on particular habitats is likely to change markedly in the coming days and weeks, possibly in response to the cold air currently moving across northern Mississippi Flyway states.